We Are The Dead

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Dr. William V. Miller, advisor
An expression of gratitude and sincere thanks is in order for my mentor, Dr. William Miller. Without his understanding advice and patient extension of deadlines, this novella could not have been completed.
A good night's sleep had been nothing more than a dim memory for the last several months. Sleeping at night period was a thing of the past. Trying to remember the last time I didn't have this chronic feeling of fatigue, I looked at my wristwatch on the nightstand--nearly six o'clock. Sleepy though I was, this was still one of my favorite times of the day. I almost always woke up before anybody else did, so I had a chance to think with a clear head for a little while before it was time to get down to work. Sometimes I would wake up thinking of Stella, even though I hadn't talked to her for nearly a month. She was a pretty good kid, all in all. Sometimes I feel like I could have treated her better than I have, but I guess that's normal.

"Hey Clint," I said, poking him in the back. "Time to get up. We've got to start in three hours."

"Shit. Already?" He rolled over and sat on the edge of the bed. Then he got up and walked toward the john, kicking the foot of the other mattress as he went by. Pete grumbled something unintelligible in protest, and Buddy responded in his usual manner by waving his two middle fingers in the air and rolling over on his stomach.
"What time is it anyway?" asked Pete.

"The big hand's straight up and the little hand's straight down," I said. Pete didn't like to think, not even a little, when he was sleepy.

"Cute, smartass... Six o'clock huh?"

"Good!" I stood up, but sat right back down again because the pit in my stomach moved up to my head and I got real dizzy. I hadn't eaten anything since about one o'clock, right after last night's show. We had pulled into town around ten this morning, but didn't stop anywhere to eat. Sometimes rest looms more important than sustenance. After a few deep breaths, I tried it again, threw on my jeans and an old kimono, and ventured outside to wake up Derik. It was his turn to sleep with the van.

"Mornin' Tom," he said. It wasn't, of course, but he always said that, just to be friendly.

"What are you doing up already?"

"I couldn't sleep, so I thought I'd try to pick out a bass solo for the instrumental we've been working on. Everybody's got one except Pete."

"I thought he was gonna try to work one in with the harmonica."

"He was, but I don't think he's come up with much yet. Besides, if we're gonna use this as an intro number, it might be nice if he just sticks with bass. I'm really just revamping the one Clint used to do. I think it will look more professional if we all play our main instruments."
"Sounds good. Maybe we can work on it tonight or tomorrow night before we tear down."

"I think I'd rather wait until we get home. We'd better have it down pretty good before we show it to Pete." He was right; Pete had only been with us for five weeks, and he wasn't yet comfortable on his own. He was still a bit shaky on some of our regular songs, let alone a quick solo.

Derik and I stayed outside and talked for a while, even though my bare feet were getting pretty chilly. But I figured if he could stand it all night, I shouldn't act like a pansy for five minutes worth. Damn Scandinavians, they won't admit to being cold for anything. All in all though, Derik was a pretty cool guy. We had been friends for nearly four years, and I had grown to respect him in a lot of ways. Not only was he a good musician, but he had some good sense too. He was one of those rare people who can say a lot without having a lot to say. He very seldom got on my nerves either, and that's really rare.

After we all got cleaned up and had a bite to eat at McDonald's, we headed for the club. It's hard for me to remember all the places I've played in (kind of like remembering all the McDonald's you've ever eaten at), but if I try real hard, I can usually recall something special about each one. Sometimes it's an embarrassing mistake or a broken string. Sometimes it's the odor of sour beer or urine. Once it was getting the wheels swiped from the van during a show. Sometimes it's nothing.
Then we play.

It may take two hours to set up, and there may only be thirty people there when we start to play, but we play. At the risk of sounding like a Jackson Browne remake, I think I can honestly speak for the whole group when I say that it's the only time that makes all the other shit you go through worth it. The playground we were en route to was a club called Bernie's Outback, more affectionately known as Bernie's Outhouse. It wasn't a bad little club, though. Kind of corny, but not bad. All the waitresses had to wear funny little cowboy hats, hiking boots, and khaki shorts, even in the winter. The decor was naturally in line with the "true spirit of the land down under," as Bernie called it. I doubt if he had ever even been there. We had played at Bernie's about six months ago; it was the first decent club we played on the road. Bernie Wilson, the owner, must have liked us that first time because he signed us up for two more weekends in the next nine months. There were only thirty or forty people there while we were setting up, but by the time old Bernie got up on the step high stage, there was a healthy crowd of seventy or eighty people.

"Ladies and gentlemen (Bernie had a corny flair for formalities), it is my pleasure to introduce to you tonight one of the true up-and-coming talents on the music, a group with its own special style, playing here for three consecutive nights at Bernie's Outback, for your listening, dancing, partying, whatever pleasure, a group I'm sure you've heard of
before, ha-ha—Déjà Vu!"

"Come on boys, let's be up-and-coming tonight," said Buddy as we skipped out from behind the black backdrop onto the tiny stage.

Bernie, somewhat reluctantly it seemed, yielded the master microphone to Clint, who replaced it on its stand. We sprang right into one of our favorites—"Questions/Carry On/Questions." Clint and I dueled on acoustics, while Derik played lead. God I love that number; it's one of the few songs that I get to play guitar on, at least for starters. We almost always use it for our first number unless we're playing to little kids or something. Even so, a lot of folks don't realize what they're listening to and don't even notice that they hear the same lyrics twice. Most of them don't even know why they're here in the first place. Of course, I shouldn't be too hard on them; if it weren't for these amoebas, people like us wouldn't have anybody to play for, and we'd have to work for a living.

When we finished, everyone clapped politely, if not enthusiastically, and when Clint told them the name of the medley and explained the Buffalo Springfield/CSNY origins of the arrangement, a few heads nodded with affected understanding and appreciation. All in all, I'll bet it's more amusing to watch the crowd than the band.

"That's right, we're Deja Vu," Clint continued. "And tonight, we're going to take you on a musical journey, a
magically mystery tour through time. We're going to do just what
our name implies. We'll take you back--back to when hair was
long and skirts were short, back when there was a wave of
awareness that flooded through this country like has never
been seen before. On guitars, Derik Jorgensen. Playing
keyboards, Tom Mintver. Our drummer, Buddy Liston. On bass,
Pete Taylor. And my name's Clint Falcone. Let's rock'n' roll
everybody!" Clint really cracks me up sometimes. He gets
pretty theatrical when he introduces us. Talk about a ham.
This guy was born doing an encore (he's got a twin sister,
Maria). I must admit, though--he's good at what he does,
which is handling an audience. I'm convinced it takes a
special blend of character traits to be a good showman, one
part thriving on mass adoration, and one part not really giving
a damn what anybody else thinks of you.

The rest of the show went pretty good except for a couple
morons in the back who kept asking if we didn't play anything
by The Cars. Clint handled it pretty well, though. He told
them we hadn't learned their three chords yet. It seems like
there's always one or two vocal changelings in every crowd.
Our sound quality wasn't anything to write home about either.
That was one of our biggest problems on the road. We
couldn't afford to pay a decent sound engineer to travel with
us, so we just had to trust our mixing board to locals that
club owners would line up for us.

After the show, Bevgie assured us that our equipment
would be safe if we didn't want to take the time to tear down.
Normally, we're pretty wary of accommodations like that on the road, but Clint knew Bernie pretty well and thought it would be all right. In fact, Clint had played at the Outhouse before we were even a band, back in the days of the now defunct Instant Breakdown, Clint's first band.

"Fine show tonight, gentlemen," Bernie said after closing. "How about a drink, on me of course." We took him up on it, even Derik. Offering a free drink to us is like offering free junk food to teenagers. "Tell me fellas, why all the old songs? You guys have an awful lot of talent here," he continued, with a sweep of his arm to include everybody. "But the nostalgia craze has died out."

"Well, there's a good reason for that Bernie," said Buddy as he picked up his shot glass of Jack Daniels from the water stained, graffiti laden bar. "It's true, we do have a lot of talent, and it's true that nostalgia isn't big anymore. But the fact of the matter is, we're basically slow. We started playing with each other, musically, even before we started puberty. Except for Pete of course. It's taken us this long to learn enough songs to make an evening of it. You can't ask us to play new songs. That'd put us out of circulation for another twelve years."

"Do you think we're too methodical?" asked Derik. "Maybe we should chuck it all and go punk."

"Yeah, we could incorporate crowd involvement a lot better," I said. "It's something to think about, anyway."
"We could have contests during the shows," said Buddy. "Whoever most creatively destroys his bar stool, in the judgement of the club owner of course, gets to molest a cocktail waitress on stage while we play." Buddy seldom talked, unless he was bullshitting somebody.

"Seriously fellas," said Bernie, who had been politely sipping on his whiskey. "I can really get into that Woodstock music you play, but I'm not everybody. I'm not part of the market. I'm too old for that. Don't you see? You're shutting doors on yourselves."

"And how many doors are we gonna open by sounding like everybody else?" I countered. "Sure, we play old songs, but those are songs that most people know and still want to hear."

"Occasionally."

I was starting to get a little tired of this smartass. My shot glass was dirty too.

"Well hey," said Clint. "We don't have to settle our whole future tonight."

"What's to settle?" said Derik.

"Nothing," said Pete. "We've got decades."

"Hey Bernie," said Clint. "I did want to throw some figures around with you if you've got a few minutes."

"Sure. We can step into my office, and I'll just go ahead and write you out a check for tonight."

"Okay," said Clint. "Hey Tom, if you guys wanna go on back to the motel, I can get Bernie to drop me off a little later."
"Yeah, I think we will," I said. "Let's cruise."

"Thanks for the drink, Bernie," said Pete.

Back at the motel, my intentions of writing a letter to Stella were waylaid. What can you do when there's a cold beer and an empty seat at the poker table waiting for you? We had been playing a lot of poker since Pete joined the group. A decade of drifting and two years in prison had paid him off with a large repertoire of card games, if nothing else. Poker was a good game for us. The penny ante games were cheap entertainment (at least the money stayed in the group). The games were pretty fun too, and I figure that's important if you're going to keep a band intact very long. These guys sure weren't in it for the money, so having a good time and a distant dream are about the only things you can really offer them. So, we play poker frequently. I generally lose, but it doesn't really matter.

We called it a night around four in the morning. Clint came in sometime after that and sacked out on the floor, since there wasn't any equipment left to guard in the van.

The next night, things went more like you might expect from a rock band, although that usually wasn't the case with us. When we arrived at Bernie's, there were three slightly aggressive and horny girls waiting for us. They had already had more than a couple drinks by the time we got there, so I didn't really think their intimations as to what might happen after the show were to be taken seriously. They were fairly cute from what I could see, which was plenty, but they were
also downright annoying. They kept getting in the way and asking stupid questions while we were tuning up. One of them, I think her name was Cheryl, or maybe Michelle, even spilled her drink on the drums, at which point I got a little disgusted and told them to go sit down. They didn’t behave any better once the show started, though. Sat right up in front trying to distract us. It worked too. During the chorus of Dylan's "Blowin' In The Wind," they repeatedly puffed out their cheeks and blew. I guess we were supposed to catch a hint there or something. They were really drunk by that time, but there was no way to get rid of them. They were regulars at the Outhouse, so I knew Bernie wouldn’t be willing to bounce them. Besides, I didn’t want any favors from him.

When they finally did leave, after the show, it was with Clint, Buddy, and Pete. They tried hard to recruit Derik, saying they were just going out for a drink at another bar. Derik, in turn, feigned excuse, saying he couldn’t drink anything because he was taking penicillin. They quit trying. I wasn’t very friendly to them, so I wasn’t surprised they didn’t ask me to go along in his place. I mean, "Blowin' In The Wind" is one of the few songs that I sing lead to, and they fouled it up for me. How nice do they expect me to be after that?

"I guess that means no poker game tonight," said Derik as we hopped into the van and headed back to the motel.
"I don't know about that," I said. "It looks like they're already playing with a full house. They had room for you, though. You should've gone with them if you wanted to."

"What, and give you a chance to be alone? Forget it. You know the rules--no privacy for anybody who plays in a rock band. Those girls weren't my type, anyway. I don't want to sleaze with some broad that's only got an hour before she passes out and turns into a pumpkin, ya know?"

"So what do we do now?"

"Aren't we supposed to forget our sorrows by immersing ourselves in our work?"

"Well then, let's write a song about sleazy pumpkins?"

"Cute."

We didn't, though. We ended up watching a couple old movies, "Yellow Submarine" and "Some Like It Hot." It gets real hard to motivate yourself into practicing and working on new material while you're on the road. You can't find truth when you don't know where you are in the first place. But what's wrong with staying up until six o'clock in the morning watching T.V. movies?

"Are you two waiting up for the kids or what?" Buddy said as he suddenly came bursting in.

"It is past your curfew, you know," I said, sounding as much like a mother hen as I could. "And where are the other boys and girls that you went out to play with?"

"I dumped them. They all threatened to spill drinks on my drums. Boy, I'll tell ya, Shirley is one of the dumbest
people I've met in a long time. She made Pete look smart. She kept kissing me and apologizing for spilling that drink. We should've played "Slut" tonight. "Slut" was a rude little song by Todd Rundgren that we played occasionally, but not very well.

"Yeah? So what happened?" I asked.

"She passed out cold on the couch."

"Told ya so," Derik said to me.

"Anyway," Buddy continued. "I don't think we'll be seeing those guys again until tomorrow night's show."

"After what they did to 'Blowin' In The Wind', it wouldn't bother me if I never saw them again," I said.

"No, I meant Pete and Clint. We won't be seeing them again until the show. They were making plans to spend the whole day with the ladies when I left. I think they were gonna go canoeing or something natural like that."

"Wonderful. Well, as long as they show up in time for the show. I just hope they're not too burned out."

We hit the sack.

When I woke up around one o'clock, I had an entire double bed to myself. That never happens. I looked around, remembering that Clint and Pete were gone, and saw Derik asleep at the little desk with the lamp still on. I got up, slowly this time, and pulled the scribbled piece of paper from under his arm, reading:
Fat Freida

You're a packaged marvel in your custom-made jeans,
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
but no matter how you're stuffed, you're never gonna look lean.
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
Junk food, health food, any food suits you,
as long as there's enough to feed a whole crew.
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida, you're so much and you're mine.

I called you on the phone, you were just sittin' round the house
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
Picked you up for a ride, but my truck broke down.
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
But you handled it with grace as we walked up the road.
How were you supposed to know it was a half ton load?
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida, you're so much and you're mine.

You never have to go to the grocery store.
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
They send delivery vans right to your front door.
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
Well, you pack it away like a whole family.
With a knife and a fork, you cut calories.
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida, you're so much and you're mine.

No doubt about it Freida, you're obtuse and obese,
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
Nobody can deny that you're quite a piece.
Shi-doo waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
Fat rolls, stretch marks, they don't look so bad.
Someday you're gonna start a Fat Freida Fad.
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida,
Fat Freida, you're so much and you're mine.

Well, my friends are teasing me about my heavy dates,
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
but when it comes to lovin' you're a real heavyweight.
Shi-doo, waba waba, shi doobi-di-doo
Big women separate the men from the boys.
Fat Freida, you're my USDA number one choice.
Fat Freida, you're so much and you're mine,
Fat Freida, a goddess in petite size twenty-nine.
Fat Freida, you don't have to be skinny just to have a good time.
Fat Freida, you're so much and you're mine.
CHAPTER 2

We came cruising back home to Indy around six the next morning, following a grueling four and a half hour drive from West Chicago. If you wanna have fun sometimes, try riding that far early in the morning with four other guys stuffed in the front of a smoky van packed full of equipment. We always squabble over who gets to drive, because the driver is the only one who has any room. We didn't mind the trip much, though, considering we had grossed a little over $1,000, not bad at all for two weekends and three clubs.

The house we lived in is a story in itself. Actually, we lived just west of Indy, near a little town called Tilden. The house was very big, two and a half stories, and very, very old. We had all agreed to move into it solely as a means of cutting costs; we were staying there for only $150 a month plus utilities, and if we were going to keep a band together, we simply couldn't afford to have five different apartments. Still, when we made the decision to move out here a month ago, it wasn't an easy one. We all emphatically agreed to respect each other's privacy, and, as much as possible, to not question the comings and goings of each other. Nobody, myself included to a certain extent, was thrilled about the arrangement, but we all tried to make the best of it.

It had also been mutually agreed that Clint would handle the money. With our limited resources, what money we
did have had to be managed efficiently, and having it done by a central treasurer, so to speak, seemed to be best. Clint paid all our bills, collected the few debts that were owed to us, and established budgets for groceries, gas, lodging, party supplies, and equipment. Anything that was left over was divided equally among us as personal spending money. Some months were good; some were lean. Clint also worked hard to arrange bookings for us in area recording studios where we could make demos, a big help in arranging club appearances. He figured we wouldn't be able to afford our own good recording equipment for quite some time, and that anyway, you never know who you might meet hanging around a studio. I was glad that we had somebody like Clint to handle all those practical matters; it gave me more time to write songs. Frankly, I hate to deal with money anyway. I think it's one of the most disgusting, artificial descendants of human nature that there is. But, you have to play along with the system sometimes.

The house itself was old, unsightly, and rumored to be haunted, but it suited our purposes admirably--it was cheap and had plenty of space. Clint and Buddy really didn't like being out in what they called the boonies, but it provided us with an undeniably convenient place to practice, with no next door neighbors complaining about the noise. The living room was big enough for us to have moderately comfortable jam sessions; and, with the double doors on either side open, the acoustics weren't too bad.
There's not much to say about the furnishings, because basically there were none. The kitchen contained an old refrigerator which had already required defrosting twice in the month we had been there. Its latch was broken, so we kept the door closed by propping a two-by-four against it. Only two of the burners worked, and even they had to be turned on by using a pair of pliers (all the knobs were gone). The kitchen table was an old spool, like the ones that are used for electrical cable or ditching tile, and it had a cheap piece of amateurishly cut and glued Formica, or a reasonable facsimile, on its top. There were two straight backed chairs, and a stack of egg crates that were pressed into service when additional seating was needed. All the other attempts at interior decorating were limited to the bedrooms. The large living room was completely unfurnished, except for a few pieces of corkboard that we had nailed up, and some cushions lying on the floor. All the other attempts at interior decorating were limited to the bedrooms, so that it reminded me of a college dorm. Take a certain amount of care in the appearance of your own room, but hang the rest of the building.

My room was, in all due modesty, the most interesting room in the house. I had the half story in the top of the house. It was long and narrow, about ten feet wide by nearly thirty feet long. The steep roof slope cut the actual walking width by half, though. When I had the windows on each end open, it was like living in a wind tunnel. What
made the room really interesting, though, was that it had a little dormer in the middle of each side, making the room actually cross-shaped instead of tunnel-shaped. The offsets measured maybe eight feet wide, with ten feet of floor space depth. Everything revolved around that small center area of the room, since it had the most natural light, coming from a small window in each dormer. In addition, the only light fixture in the entire room hung from an open ceiling joist in the center of the room. There I kept a large doortop desk facing the front north side of the house. On the left of it was my one prized possession, a beat up but well tuned Gulbransen upright piano (don't ask me how we got it up there). On the right, completing my little horseshoe work area, was a bookcase. The staircase was on the east end of the room, though I seriously doubt that it had originally been there; it had probably been near the center of the house with a landing near the dormers and a room on either side. Someone must not have liked the staircase in the middle, and decided to turn the upstairs into an attic when they changed things around. On the West side of the room, which I usually kept draped off by an old blanket, was my bed, a small dresser, and a standing closet rod. I expected it would get unbearably hot in the summer, but for now it was perfect.

Buddy, Derik, and Pete had their rooms on the second floor. On the northwest corner was Buddy. His room was a little bigger than the others, and it was usually the room we went to when
we were just lounging around. For furniture, he had his bed, an old, tattered couch, and a nice recliner that his parents had given him when he moved out of their house and into this place. He wouldn't let anybody else sit in his chair, which led to a few mama's boy jokes, but I really can't blame him. He had a nice, black shag rug that covered most of the floor, and an expensive glass coffee table too. Add an impressive Pioneer stereo system, and a dandy little Panasonic color T.V., and you've got by far and away the most luxurious room in the house. Buddy had some money; he worked part time in Indy as a mechanic at a little Yamaha dealership that his uncle owned. The rest of the room decor consisted of a large bong that he constructed with parts he had acquired from the motorcycle shop, and a bigger-than-life-size poster of the late John Bonham in concert.

Across the hall was the bathroom, and it was a real pit. It only had your basic bathtub, toilet, sink, mirror and cabinet. One of the first things we did was to rig up a shower head and curtain. Mildew had covered the walls and ceiling, but it was so thick and had covered everything so thoroughly that it wasn't really noticeable.

The room beside the bathroom was Pete's, and except for the living room, it was the most bare room in the house. It didn't even have a bed; he slept on two sleeping bags that were layered on the floor. It didn't have a dresser either, and he kept his few clothes, which were inevitably wrinkled, in an Army surplus duffle bag. It didn't seem to bother him, though. When questioned by visitors about
his lack of conveniences, he was fond of saying that he had spent the better part of the last ten years living out of a van and a duffle bag, and that the accommodations here suited him just fine. The worst part of his last ten years were spent in prison, six months worth. He didn't seem to have any criminal or violent tendencies, however, and the episode was never mentioned outside the group. His room did have a functioning lamp, on a functional end table, by a functional stuffed chair, and it was there that he engaged in his favorite pastime, reading. His standard reading material and one of his few possessions was a complete hardback collection of the works of Zane Grey, his favorite writer. He had a voracious appetite for Westerns, and he claimed to have read every one of the books in that collection at least three times. Most of the time that we spent there at the house, if there was nothing better to do, he could be found in his room, nursing a beer and reading Zane Grey.

Derik's room was across the hall from Pete's and beside Buddy's. Derik was also an active reader, but his tastes were somewhat different than Pete's. Derik was a lover of English literature and Romantic poetry. The focal point of his room was a set of two tall bookcases, very nearly filled with paperbacks from classical literature survey courses and an extensive home library. His parents weren't very happy about him playing in a rock band, but they were still nice to him. They probably didn't want to alienate him, figuring that he would soon outgrow this phase and
return home with intentions of following in his father's footsteps and going to med school. I think nothing was further from his mind. For being a rich kid, and a doctor's son at that, he was marvelously adept at getting by on meager fare, which I attribute solely to the fact that probably for the first time in his life, he was doing what he wanted to do. Two years of junior college at an exclusive private school had exhausted his patience for the upper crust of society. I don't mean to say that he didn't get along with his parents; he never said anything bad about them. In fact, he seldom spoke of them at all. If anything, he seemed to be slightly ashamed of his background, and I can't say that I blame him. He no longer received any financial support from his parents; three afternoons a week he taught guitar lessons in Carmel, a northern suburb. The rest of his room was somewhat cluttered with guitars (he had a total of six), packs of strings, sheets of music, and other paraphernalia that a dedicated guitarist might keep on hand. His furniture consisted of a bed, a wooden stool, and a bean bag chair.

Clint's room was downstairs. It was large and adequately furnished, with a fairly new queen size bed, a dresser, and a large walk-in closet. Clint actually spent very little time at the house, and his were the comings and goings that were predominantly unquestioned. I wondered for awhile if he really detested this place and its company, yet it was his idea in the first place, being the only business-minded member
of the group. He even picked the place out, and signed the lease. None of the rest of us had even met the landlord.

Having finally arrived at this lovely dwelling sometime after six in the morning, we unloaded the van in record, even breakneck time. There was purpose in our madness, though. We all wanted to get in bed before it got too light to fall asleep. It didn't work for me. I tossed and turned for nearly two hours before I finally drifted off. It was good to be home, though, and this place was certainly starting to feel like home.

I got up around noon, though, when Pete came clodding up the steps to tell me I had a phone call. I knew who it was before he told me. Stella. Even though I hadn't talked to her for nearly three weeks, I knew that she would somehow know exactly when we got back. Besides, my mother is the only other person who ever calls me, and she never does until after 5:00 p.m. It had to be Stella; no one else I knew had my new phone number.

"Hello," I said, being as courteous as possible under the four hour nap circumstances.

"Tommy? It's me, Stella."

"Hi! Howya doin'? I can carry on a pretty deep phone conversation when I want to, but I was just warming up.

"I'm fine. But I wanna know about you. How was the trip? You went up north, right?"

"Right, we played this past weekend at Bernie's Outback. I probably told you about it before. Before that, we played Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in a little hole called the Underground Escape, which was what we wanted to do, and the
first weekend went pretty well at a place called Siren's Song. All in all, we're real pleased with how everything went. It might be a little easier now for us to get bookings up that way."

"How's that?"

"Well, it's the first time we've played more than one club up there. A lot of people got to see us, so we're hoping the word gets around to some other clubs. Clint's gonna start working on it next week."

"Sounds good. You know you guys are getting big sooner than you thought you would. Hey listen, after a week and a half on the road, I thought a home-cooked meal might be just what you need. How 'bout it?"

"Sure, when do you want me?" I knew it wouldn't take her too long to get around to that part of the conversation.

"Tonight?"

"Oh. Well, we had planned to work on some new numbers and come up with a solo for Pete. But I can probably slip away for a little while."

"Is six o'clock all right then?"

"Why so early? Aren't you working today?"

"Yeah, I'm just on lunch right now."

"Well, if you don't get off work until five, that doesn't give you much time to get home and get things started." She liked for me to come over before dinner was ready so I could watch her cook. But I didn't really feel like it tonight.

"So why don't we make it at eight. That'll give you some time to get things ready and maybe I can get some work done before I come in, okay?"
"Are you sure you can wait that long? Won't you get awfully hungry?"

"No, I'll be fine. Really."

"Well, I'll see you at eight then. But no later."

"Right. I'll be on time. Bye."

"Bye-bye."

There wasn't much hope of going back to sleep now, so I made the rounds to see if anybody else was awake. Pete was. As usual, he was sitting in front of the window in his chair reading Zane Grey's *The Shepherd of Guadaloupe*.

"Hey, sorry about the phone call," I said. "I can't hear anything from up there."

"I know. No problem, I was having trouble sleeping anyway. Come on in; have a seat." He pointed to an imaginary chair. I sat down on his sleeping blanket with my back against the wall. "So that was your lady friend. Ya know I haven't met her yet."

"You're not missing very much. Oh, I shouldn't say that; she's a nice girl really."

"You gonna get married sometime?"

"I doubt it. I've got a long way to go before I'll start thinking about getting married. She's patient, but she's not job either."

"Ya know (he said that a lot, 'ya know'), getting married was probably the second biggest mistake I ever made in my life."

"You were married??"

"What's so shocking about that?"

"When?"
"Five months after I got out of the Army. We got married on Christmas Day, 1970."

"No kidding?" How come you never told us?"

"I don't like to talk about it much. Like I said it was the second biggest mistake I ever made."

"What was your biggest mistake, stealing that car?"

"Nope, getting divorced." His eyes were a little glassy, so I knew he meant it. "It was nice being married; I just wasn't willing to give up anything to keep her. She was a real gem too, or could have been with a little polishing. Her name was Ian, Ian Weatherby."

"Any kids?"

"Nope, no kids thankfully. I may have been a soldier that didn't like to shoot, a lousy husband, a car thief, and an all-round bum, but at least I can say I've never been a deserting father. That happened to me when I was kid; I wouldn't wish that shit on anybody." He looked down at the floor now, as if he was somewhat surprised that he had made such a profound statement, and needed to reflect on it. The high sun was still shining through the window behind him, and for the first time really, I noticed that his light brown hair was getting rather sparse on top and turning a little grey on the sides. I always knew he was thirty-five, but this was the first time that I could recall him really looking it. In fact, right now he looked much older.

"When did you get a divorce, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Let's see. We were married for three years and five months, so that would have been in May, 1973. No, '74. We just decided it wasn't going to work. I was too set in my ways to change, and she was tired of packing up and leaving
a place before it was a home. She had some friends there, that lived just outside of Tempe. At least Mom had died by then. I was glad she didn't have to be around when we split up, and later when I went to prison."

"Was being in prison as traumatic as you always hear?"

"Well, it was no picnic, but I didn't get raped or anything like that. In fact, I only heard of that happening a couple times, and they were perverts anyway."

We whiled away the better part of two hours there talking, or rather he talked and I listened. I have nothing against one-sided conversations, though, either way, unless the person doing the talking is a real egotist. Pete certainly wasn't. I think he basically just needed somebody to talk to, and I was a little ashamed of myself for not taken this time with him sooner. In a decade of relatively aimless drifting, I imagine his opportunities to talk to someone on anything better than a superficial level were few. His lack of eloquence and self-conscious stammerings reinforced my assumption. But he had a lot to tell, especially of the time he spent in Viet Nam. Once he got over the verbal stumbling blocks, his eidetic accounts of his war experiences were unlike any I could ever remember seeing or hearing before.

"Hey, what do you gabs think this is, a French salon?" Derik said sarcastically as he came in and seated himself beside me on the sleeping bag. "How do you expect a guy to get any sleep around here?"

"Oh sorry, Derik. I didn't mean to wake you up," said Pete completely missing the intention. It was Derik's backward
way of saying, "Mind if I join you?"

Pete must not have cared to develop another confidant at this time, though, so I soon suggested that we move up to my room and work on Pete's solo. Derik was very nearly finished with it, and Pete was anxious to give it a try. He caught on much quicker than I expected, and within an hour and a half, he was playing it completely, if somewhat roughly. I think Derik was surprised too.
CHAPTER 3

Dinner at Stella's that evening was a real trip. It usually turned out that way. Sometimes she would go all out and fix something really nice, complete with Riunite and candles, and sometimes she would go out of her way to show me that she wasn't going out of her way. Tonight it was the former. I had a feeling that she hadn't just whipped everything up in the two and a half hours since she had been home from work. The pot roast with gravy sauce that she made had probably been simmering in a crock pot all day long, and the funky looking gelatin mold that she brought out of the refrigerator wasn't any two hour affair either.

Stella's apartment was cute, but it was certainly lacking in character when compared to the Dëjà Vu manor. The dominant color was white, giving it the sterile effect of a dentist's office. She had a nicely furnished, roomy kitchen, which she liked to make me think was where she spent most of her time. The living room was small and cozy, with a cream colored overly overstuffed couch, rich tan shag carpeting, and a T.V. stereo console system. Like most women, she wasn't very demanding of her high fidelity quality. The bedroom was large enough for all the things she needed in it, which I really can't begin to name. I don't often notice things like that.
"How did you know we'd be getting back today?" I asked her, as we settled down on the couch to finish off the bottle of wine. It was a rosé this time.

"You told me a week before you left. Remember?"

"Oh that's right." I didn't remember, but sometimes it's best not to tell those things. In my experience with women, I've found they generally feel hurt if you don't remember what you tell them, not to mention if you don't remember what they tell you. Stella was no exception.

"How did the new guy do on the road trip?" she asked.

"Is he getting better?"

"Pete? Yeah, he's coming along real well. Derik and I worked with him on that solo this afternoon, and he picked up on it real fast. We'll probably be able to use it in another week or two."

"Great."

"You know, Pete's a really interesting guy."

"How so?"

"He's just done so much. For most of the last ten years he has just traveled around the country, working odd jobs from place to place. He spent a year and a half in Viet Nam too. God, the things he saw there. He told me about napalmed little kids running up to him, tearing off their clothes and screaming for help. Our country right or wrong, huh? I don't think I could have handled that. He told me about--"

"That's okay. I get the picture. Why don't we see what's on T.V.?" She turned it on and flipped the dials.
It was funny to watch her. She wouldn't even pause at any channel broadcasting sports. She hated sports, except for hockey. Them, she liked to watch skate. She wasn't much more merciful with the sitcoms either, and I have to admit, her judgment on those was pretty good. The program she finally settled on was a movie about an old Indian. When his time to die came, he left the reservation and went back to the now tourist infested mountains that were once the land of his forefathers. Stella got pretty choked up about the whole deal, and we ended up watching the whole thing, or she did, rather. I fell asleep, but since I already figured that the old guy's presence would distract the tourist business, which it did, and that he would be sent back to the reservation to die, which he was, I didn't miss much. Television kills me. How people can sit in front of their T.V. sets night after night after night, and think they are being entertained, I'll never know.

I think Stella tried to wake me up when the movie was over, but I can't say for sure. I vaguely remember getting kissed on the forehead and the lights turning out.

When I woke up in the morning, it was to the sound of Stella making breakfast and clearing off last night's dishes.

"Good morning," I said, half walking, half stumbling into the kitchen.

"Well, good morning, tiger. Breakfast is almost ready."

"I fell asleep on you last night, didn't I? Sorry."

"Fell asleep? No, you were a real Casanova. I had to
hit you over the head with the wine bottle to slow you down. I’ve never been so lusted after in my entire life, even when we were in high school.” She was trying to make me think she was upset with me, but I knew she really wasn’t. At least I think I knew. I was still too sleepy to say for sure.

“You haven’t been getting much sleep have you Tom? It’s not like you to sack out at nine thirty when you’re probably used to staying up until three or four in the morning.”

“It’s just the schedule mostly. If I could just get into a routine of sleeping at the same time every day, I’d be all right. I’m real sorry I fell asleep, though. I feel like a cad.”

“Don’t worry about it. I shouldn’t have dragged you over here on your first night back in town. You owe me a night out before you take off again though. Where are you playing this weekend anyway?”

“We don’t have much scheduled for a couple of weeks. We’re playing after prom dances on the next two Saturday nights.”

“After proms? C’mon, you guys can do better than that.”

“Yeah, but we didn’t know that four months ago when we signed for them. We’ve got tonight, tomorrow, and Thursday at Jacob’s Ladder on the North side too. I think we start there tonight anyway. Is today Tuesday?”

“Oh, brother, you’re a case. Yes, today is Tuesday. Here have some coffee.” I hovered my nose over the coffee cup, inhaling the warmth and aroma, hoping to get a small dose of caffeine while it was still too hot to drink. “You’re playing at Jacob’s, huh? I might slip out and watch the show tomorrow
night, if you don't care."

"No, I don't care. I'd like that. You haven't heard us in about two months, so you might be in for a surprise."

Stella came over to the table, taking away my coffee cup before I burned my nose, and replacing it with a plate of bacon and eggs. It wasn't one of her better efforts. The eggs were hard, and the bacon was greasy, but I was victimized by that rare mixture of hunger and sleepiness that makes you eat something without even being aware of having tasted it.

"What time do you have to be at work?"

"7:45," she said. "I need to leave now."

"Don't you ever get tired of cleaning people's teeth, and sitting there with a little hose suctioning their spit while the dentists drill holes in their mouths?"

"Sure, but I expect everybody gets tired of their job now and then."

"I don't."

"You don't have a job."

"Yes, but there's got to be more to life than just going to work and collecting a paycheck every two weeks."

"Sometimes there's more, sometimes not."

"Just look at us. We don't have much money, and we all had to move into a rundown old house just to save a few bucks, but we all enjoy what we're doing. When everything's said and done, that's what really matters."

"Yeah, and you're brightening the lives of throngs of people with your songs, right? Gimme a break."

"No, most people don't even listen to our songs. We just
happen to be playing where they decided to get drunk that night. But, there's always a chance that people will notice if we just work real hard and put everything together. Then maybe we can do something purposeful."

"I hope so. Hey, I've gotta go."

"All right. Thanks for the meals, Dimples. I really appreciate it." Dimples was a nickname I called her when we dated in high school. She really didn't have dimples. I just used to call her that. "I'm really sorry I fell asleep on you too. I'll make it up to you. Promise."

"I know. We'll get together again soon, okay?"

She gave me a quick kiss as I was getting out of the chair.

"Now get out of here, will ya?"

"Okay, I'm gone." She really confuses me sometimes. I can't tell if she just wants to be good friends, or if she wants to be something more. I don't think she knows what she wants, but what the hell, I really don't know what I want it to be either. Uncertainty is the force that keeps people alive. If everybody knew what they were going to do or how things were going to turn out, they wouldn't bother to continue. There wouldn't be any reason to.

Buddy was out in the driveway working on a motorcycle when I arrived home in the van. One look up, and he started grinning from ear to ear.

"Hello sir, what can I do for you?" he said, walking up to me and offering his best used motorcycle salesman handshake.
"Ya know, I used to drive an old van like the one you've got there. It didn't run for shit either. I've got just what you need though." For effect, he paused and spat a well aimed stream of tobacco juice on my left front tire. "See that new Yamaha 650 over there? Yes sir, the ladies gather around a nice bike like flies on shit. But an old van? Now what self respecting father is gonna let his daughter go out with some dirty vagabond in a second generation microbus. No sir, a sinwagon like this just smacks of pervertedness and disease. About all you'll get in there is some Fat Freida. Believe me, I've tried. But a new motorcycle, well now you're talking. Ya see, the old men don't have to fear so much for their daughters' chastity. They might even let you in the house when you pick her up. Now, if you'll just give me those keys, I'll get rid of this outdated passion pit for you. That's it. Now you can just hop on that 65 miles per gallon of machismo, and you can kiss this old van's gas goodbye."

Buddy hopped in the van, revved it up, and backed out onto the road. He drove off towards town. He sure had a novel way of asking to borrow the keys. Now it was Clint's turn.

"Well, well, well," he said as he came strutting out the door. "If it isn't the return of the American Gigolo." There wasn't much point in trying to defend myself. It would only have made matters worse. "Yeah, I remember the first night I got lost on my way home. I think I was fourteen at the time."

"Buddy couldn't get his 'cycle for the week' started, huh?" I said, trying to change the subject.
"Yeah, bad vacuum in the fuel line. I think he's got it about ready to go, but he was running late for work. I guess I'll have to try it out for him this afternoon when I go into town." Clint was always borrowing Buddy's company motorcycles.

"You're a real pal, Clint."

"Aw, he'd do the same for me."

"I'm sure he would. Hey, don't get lost this afternoon. We play at eight tonight, remember?"

"Don't talk to me about getting lost, Romeo."

"Are Derik and Pete here?"

"Yeah, but I don't think they're up yet."

"We really should practice a little before tonight. Do you know when Buddy's coming back?"

"Not for sure, but I imagine it will be sometime early this afternoon. In that case maybe I'll just go into town now so we can all get together later and play a little."

"Sounds good."

"See you later, stud." He jumped on Buddy's motorcycle and it started right away for him, surprisingly enough. Or maybe not. Clint was just one of those guys that a motorcycle wouldn't dare not start for. Off he went, full throttle, racing through the gears and piercing the silence of the crisp country morning. He was too cool to wear a helmet, preferring to let his coal black hair blow in the breeze, and he was too proud to wear a jacket, opting instead for a light warmup sweater which was unzipped down past his sternum. He
liked to let people see his hairy chest, but no amount of his own fur was going to keep him warm on that bike. I was chilly just standing there.

Since Derik and Pete were still asleep, I went up to my room with the intention of working on some new songs. But at eight o'clock in the morning I just didn't feel very lyrical, so I left my songs untouched on my desk and picked up my worn copy of 1984. It was one of my favorite books. "How could you have a slogan like 'freedom is slavery' when the concept of freedom has been abolished?" it asks. If you stop to think about it, which isn't entirely sane, you have to wonder if we really do still have a concept of freedom. People just do what they're told to do, it seems. They never stop to ask why anymore. We may not have a Big Brother, we may never have one, but there are always different means to an end. But what happens when the end comes about without any means? That's really scary. There's no way to fight it, because noone's aware of anything happening.

The gig that night went all right, but it was nothing to shout about. We were pretty well known at Jacob's, so there weren't very many new people to get excited about us. But I guess we weren't too excited about them either. Everybody just went to bed as soon as we got home, as we were still pretty exhausted from the road trip. I stayed up for a while working on songs, though. I guess I feel more lyrical at two in the morning than at eight. A little later I went down to the kitchen for a bedtime snack of Oreos and milk, noticing
the all too familiar smell of pot seeping through from under Clint's bedroom door.

He came out into the kitchen a few minutes later to see who it was.

"Aha!" he said. "caught in the act. You'd better give up. There's no way out now."

"Thus ends the career of the Refrigerator Raider," I said.

"Ya know, Tom, I was talking to Ronnie Stinson at Palomar studios today, and he gave me a line on something pretty big."

"Stinson? What do you mean?" I had never been much of a Ronnie Stinson fan, and Clint knew it. He managed a recording studio, but getting studio time scheduled with him was largely a matter of kissing ass better than the next guy.

"Well, it's all very hush-hush right now, and he wouldn't even tell me where he got wind of it, but there's gonna be a big jam festival at the Speedway this fall."

"Who's playing?"

"Dylan, Guthrie, Joni Mitchell, maybe even Stephen Stills. Nobody who would be apt to know is talking about it yet."

"No kidding?"

"That's what Stinson said anyway."

"So why would he tell you?"

"There's a reason. The rumor he heard said they were gonna let a couple locals play too."

"Holy shit."

"That's what I said too. He said we're as good as anybody
else in town, so we might have a chance."

"What's in it for him? I really don't trust him. He's screwed us on studio time before. I just can't believe he would be the kind of guy to do us a favor."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Maybe he just wants to see one of his studio groups get a chance at it though. Maybe he's on the level. The studio was all booked up for the next couple weeks, but he bumped a couple commercial sessions for me right away, and set us up to record Monday and Tuesday mornings next week. He's never done that for me before."

"All the more reason to be suspicious."

"Oh I'm sure he's got an ulterior motive for telling us, but what of it? Just think of the opportunity we've got here. Imagine playing on the same stage as Dylan. It could be the break we need."

"I'm not gonna hold my breath yet. It's too far away yet to tell."

"Well, I'll see what I can find out in the next couple days. I just thought I'd let you know what I heard." He went back to his bedroom, somewhat pleased with himself for having dropped an early morning bombshell on me.
CHAPTER 4

Clint pumped everyone he knew for information about the Festival. He knew almost everyone too. He had friends in the area recording studios, in concert promotions firms, even at the Speedway, but none of them were talking. He said he interpreted their reticence as a positive sign. They always had time to talk to him before, and most of what they usually talked about was gossip.

Before the show that night, Clint did manage to confirm the rumor from James Cobb, the owner of Jacob's Ladder. Cobb was, by all affectionate terms, a crook, but he had a lot of friends, ran a profitable business, and had a good ear for the local music scene. Clint and Buddy first met each other working for him as cleanup boys during their high school years. Clint wound up staying there after high school and had worked his way up to assistant manager by the time he quit and joined up with his first bona fide band two years ago, "Instant Breakdown." Clint and Cobb were still close, and he told Clint everything he had heard about the alleged festival. The information was basically the same that we had gotten from Stinson.

The crowd that night was small, about a hundred people, one of whom was Stella. I didn't notice her until we were about halfway through the show. When I finally did, I got a little nervous for some reason. She hadn't seen my band play for a couple months, before Pete joined us.
It was kind of like showing your kid to someone who hasn't seen her for years, and hoping that she acts more grownup than she did the last time. After the show, the guys went home and I went with Stella to Louie's, an all night diner near her apartment. We used to frequent it in high school.

"You're sounding a lot better together," she said after we ordered. "I don't care what anybody else thought; it was an excellent musical experience. But I still don't think you sound like a walrus."

"My tusks aren't long enough?"

"Something like that. Oh, it was so nice when we used to come here in high school. Remember how we always got in trouble for breaking curfew? My folks always threatened to make me quit seeing you. They never could have done it, though, and they knew it."

"My parents never said much about it though."

"I guess we're still breaking curfew. One o'clock is awfully late for a working girl."

"Not that again."

"I'm sorry. Tom, did you ever wonder, back then, how everything would turn out, what we'd be doing now?"

"Sure sometimes. I don't know. I guess I really just hoped life would go on just like it was. It wasn't bad. We were living from one day to the next, one weekend to the next, and having a real good time along the way. I never wanted that part to end. We had the time to get acquainted with life. We could watch for familiar faces in the clouds."
"The clouds are still there, Tom. Did the faces leave?"
"You don't see them anymore, do you? The faces left when the proving ground arrived."
"Maybe they'll come back someday."
"Maybe."
"Oh well, enough of that. You're starting to depress me."
"Sorry."
"How's life at the haunted house?"
"We haven't had any crises yet. Everybody's minding their own business pretty well. It's hard for me to get work done though, but I think it's more a problem of application than situation."
"How is Derik? I worry about him sometimes. He feels so much more than he says."
"Yeah, I know what you mean. He's been even quieter than normal lately, but I think he's mostly not accustomed to living with other people. Even when we were in college, he mostly stuck to himself. He's getting a little tired of his job too. I think wasting all that energy on rich kids who want to be overnight Dan Foglebergs is starting to catch up with him. He'll be all right, though. It's Clint who's been the real enigma around the place."
"What's his problem? He was awfully cold to me tonight after the show."
"What did he say?"
"Nothing. He just ignored me."
"He's been doing that to us a lot too. I don't know what his problem is." The waitress brought our pie and coffee, which she spilled neatly in the saucers. I watched it diffuse through the paper doily. She reminded me of an old lady I remembered from a Bounty commercial.

We ate the snack in silence. Stella was trying to figure out how to say it and I was trying to figure out how to answer. I felt really phoney for some reason. All the time in the world wasn't going to change the rules of the game. I should have initiated the inevitable conversation and taken the pressure off her, but I didn't. I could almost see her thought process too, trying to decide whether to ask me now, or wait until we got in the car. I felt a little sorry for her. There were all kinds of ways to say it (I really don't feel like driving all the way out to your place and back—I've got some etchings I want to show you at my apartment—or the sincere, Tom, stay with me tonight; I want to be with you), but there was no right way.

She waited until after I paid the tab, refusing any more coffee from the Bounty lady.

"Well, are you going to sleep with me tonight or not?" she demanded.

"Sure."

Stella called in sick to work the next day. She brought me back over to the mansion in the afternoon, and everybody was there. Clint was on the phone with a club in Cincinnati;
the rest of the guys were getting stoned in Buddy's room, watching reruns of Gilligan's Island. We just went on upstairs to my room. I was a little embarrassed about the whole thing, but all Stella said was that she was glad to see the boys were having a good time.

"So this is your little workshop, huh?" she said as I opened the door to my room.

"For what it's worth, I haven't gotten much accomplished since we've moved in, but I've got everything I need, except time."

I hopped into my seat at the piano and banged out a couple of rough new tunes for her. She always used to like it when I played something just for her. I remembered once at my house when we were sixteen that I played for her all night long. It was when I first told her that I liked to play the guitar and piano, and she demanded, right in the middle of some corny movie, that I take her back to my house and play something for her. I only knew a half dozen songs and parts of others at the time, but it didn't matter to her. She wanted to hear them over and over again. I played for her all the time back then. I guess I've never really stopped.

Clint came up a little later, while we were napping on my bed, and asked to borrow Stella's car, so he could go into Jacob's early and pick up our money. He muttered something about Cobb not going to be around later tonight. Stella consented, so a little later she found herself riding
in the van with Derik, Pete, Buddy, and me. She and Pete seemed to hit it off real good. She treated him like a working class Alistair Cook, asking him endless questions on Americana. Pete seemed to enjoy her too. It gave him a chance to draw a little interest from his vault of experience.

When we got there, Clint was in a working frenzy. "Hurry up gentlemen," he said as we entered. "We start in an hour." He had already hooked up the sound board, checked the lights, and was in the process of tuning his guitar. Our sound and light man, Richie Liston, had just showed up too, but there wasn't much left for him to do. Richie was Buddy's first cousin, and he had been our engineer at home for seven months, as long as Déjà Vü had been around. He came out to the mansion quite often to party too. We were planning on taking him on full time in another month, as soon as he graduated from high school.

"Hi guys," Stella said cordially as she came back from the bar with her sloe gin fizz.

"Oh, hi Stella," said Clint, wiping the beads of sweat from his upper lip. "I didn't see you come in. C'mon guys, I think we need to come up with a new format for tonight. Last night's audience was mostly repeats, and it'll probably be the same people again tonight."

We let Clint have his way, since we somehow felt irresponsible for not arriving early. We started out with "Somebody to Love," "Fat Freida," and "Where There is No
"Darkness," some of our upbeat, rocking numbers. After the first set was done, Clint took it from there.

"Thank you. This being our third and final night here at the Ladder," he said, neglecting to introduce us. "Most of you lovely people out there have already heard us play before. So tonight, we're gonna play it your way. Any song you wanna hear, just shout it out, all right? And we'll play it for you. Who's got the first one out there?"

"'A Day in the Life'," Stella piped up before anyone else had a chance to say anything. She bailed us out. I couldn't believe Clint sprang this on us without any warning, but we were stuck with it now. Evidently, Buddy, Pete, and Derik were a bit upset too, because we really butchered that damn song. Before we could start another, some asshole in the middle of the crowd requested "Lay it on the Line."

"Sorry, we don't play that one," said Clint, diplomatic as hell.

"How 'bout 'Hurt So Good'," came from somebody else.

"We don't do that one either." A few people started to laugh at us.

"Play 'Wind Up'," a voice clear in the back yelled. It was Cobb, and he looked worried. We played it, with fewer mistakes too.

And so it went for half an hour--everybody having a good time at our expense. People requested songs from "You Dropped a Bomb on Me" to "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boys" to "Moonlight Sonata." Richie managed to move around the club a little,
and yell out a couple songs to help us out. It was all pretty embarrassing, though. Finally, we took a break. We had to; Buddy and Derik got up and left the stage, retreating to an employees lounge room backstage.

"What in the hell are you trying to do, man?" screamed Derik, when Clint finally came in. "You're killing us out there."

"Sorry guys, I just wanted to try something a little different. I didn't think it would backfire here."

"Well it's different all right. Next time you want to try something different, don't make us look like a bunch of hemorrhoids!" Derik was pretty hot. His face was red, and the veins in his forehead and neck were sticking out, making him look like a wrinkled apple with blond hair.

"I said I was sorry, dammit!"

"What do we do now?" Derik asked me.

"I don't know." I was too mad to think, and too smart to talk.

"We've got some Preparation H somewhere, don't we?" Buddy mocked.

"I've got an idea," said Pete. "We haven't done 'Seedless Jam' yet. We can start with that when we go back on. If we go out there one at a time, they probably won't start in with those stupid requests--not until Clint comes back on anyway. Derik can go out first and start his solo. Then I'll go out, and so on. We'll just each come out right before our instrument starts. That'll get us through the first song
anyway. If we start up with another song right away, we might be able to put a damper on the request line. How's it sound guys?"

"Might work," said Derik. "Let's stick with the CSNY songs and run through a whole set of them. We'll do the medley first, right after 'Seedless Jam' and then go to 'Woodstock' to 'Helplessly Hoping' to 'For What It's Worth' to 'Four Days Gone' to 'Déjà Vu' to 'Helpless' to 'Teach Your Children.' Everybody got it? No time between songs now. Be ready to start the next one as soon as we end a song. Any questions? You got it Clint? We'd better do 'Seedless Jam' without you this time, and then you don't come in on the medley until the start of 'Carry On'. Tom and I can handle guitars through the first 'Questions'."

He took a few minutes to tune his twelve string and calm down, and then he walked out, looking like John Wayne carrying a six and a double six shooter, and grumbling a determined "Let's go boys." I almost had to laugh, with Derik walking out like our determined shepherd and Clint looking rather sheepish. But since we still had to survive the rest of the show, the situation was a little too tense for humor. Even Buddy didn't have much to say.

We got through the instrumental number unscathed, but our aspirations for the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young set prove to be a bit deluded. Some of the hecklers had slithered up to the front during the break, and let go a volley of asinine requests as soon as we finished the medley.
"Come on you guys," said Clint, a little short on composure now. "Give us a break, huh?"

"But you said it was request night," said this one bearded jerk up front. He was drunk, thin, obnoxious, and bug-eyed, with a black Panama hat for covering premature balding. Wearing a long, dingey overcoat and tennis shoes, he looked like the kind of guy who would get his jollies by harassing rock bands and flashing old ladies on public transport. "Why don't you play what we ask then?" The whole club stopped to listen to him, and he was obviously enjoying it. He was probably having more fun than he did on the bus.

"But you're not requesting any songs that we play," countered Clint. Real smooth. "Look, we've got a couple Crosby, Stills, Nash, and--"

"The hell with them," he said, coming forward. He staggered up the steps onto our platform, nearly tripping over the footlights in the process. He took Clint's microphone out of his stand and turned to address the audience. I should have stopped him, but I just couldn't move. Clint controlled my attention. He just backed away and let the asshole take over. His mouth was hanging open, his eyes wide and white, and he was weaving forward and back, like some tripped out Weebil. The jerk continued.

"I've got a request here, that maybe, just maybe, these fine musicians can perform without fucking it up." He paused for effect and the audience's laughter. "Why don't you guys
try the 'Sound of Silence'.' The crowd was starting to sound a little vicious, and the muffled murmur rose to an outbreak of laughter, jolting Clint out of his trance. He dropped his guitar to the floor. He reached out and throttled the jerk. He squeezed and locked his fingers around his neck, and the poor jerk's eyes bugged out wide and white, like Clint's. More people jumped up on stage. Buddy and Derik bounded to the front, trying to unfasten the jerk and Clint. No one was laughing now, only screaming. Everybody came rushing to the stage with white eyes and outstretched arms. I tried to look for Stella, but the commotion on stage to my right brought my eyes back to the brawl.

Buddy and Derik were no longer trying to pry Clint's fingers from the other guy's throat. Derik had been pulled to the main floor and was being beaten. Buddy was kicking some fat guy who was lying on stage and starting to puke. He had broken the neck of Derik's acoustic guitar with his fall. The mass of confusion was still in the center, though, where Clint was now barely struggling at the bottom of a pile. I couldn't really see much of him, though. All I could see were wide, bulging eyes and a few bloody fists. Pete flew into the pile and I jumped up to help him. Pete was strong, stronger than I thought, and he threw a couple bodies back off the stage before I got there. Everybody was charging the stage now. We managed to pitch away the rubble of bodies and finally get to Clint, unconscious and bloody, the powder on his face coagulating with blood.
"Take him backstage, quick!" yelled Pete.

I grabbed Clint by the shoulders as Pete jumped down into the crowd and started cuffing people on top of the pile where Derik lay submerged. As I was dragging him offstage, someone came up and lifted Clint's legs, helping me. It was Cobb. His eyes were wide and white too. Everyone's were.

"What the hell got into him?" he puffed.

"I wish to God I knew," I said. "Has anybody called the cops yet?"

"They're on the way. God, an episode like this could ruin me."

"We all feel sorry for you," I told the bastard, as he left to survey the damage. Clint had been damaged plenty too. He was a mess. I checked his pulse and breathing, but I couldn't tell much from it except that both seemed to be working. Anything else would have to be taken care of by people who knew something about this kind of thing. I left him lying on the floor, closing the door behind me. I remembered thinking on my way back to the stage how much I hated the people we play for.

It was still going on strong, but most of the people were just raising hell amongst themselves now. I still couldn't see Stella anywhere. Pete had rescued Derik and they were both lying in a corner off to the left by an overturned table. It looked like Pete had taken a few shots to his face. Both were conscious, but Derik kept his hands at the side of his belly. Blood was seeping through.
I looked around for a pile with Buddy's name on it, but most of the people had settled down to breaking tables and windows. Buddy held his own. There were three unconscious drunks lying on the floor beside the fat one on stage, and he was preparing another one to join them. Buddy was a hell of a fighter. Really.

On the other side of the stage, the jerk laid unconscious. One of his friends was holding his hat and trying to revive him. I went up and kicked the incoherent fucker in the side. It made me laugh when I heard a couple of his ribs cracking. His friend lunged for me, calling me a son of a bitch and sending me crashing through the drum set. It was stupid, but behind my anger I wondered if our insurance would cover us for something like this. The friend came after me and hit me in the stomach while I was sprawled amid the drums. I kicked him in the nuts, though, and managed to buy enough time to pull myself out of the drums. I swung at him as he straightened up again, but only hit him in the shoulder. My hand hurt. He grabbed me and we wrestled on the floor, damaging one of my guitars, and knocking over a microphone which echoed through the whole club when it fell. We rolled around some more, but the jerk got in the way, and a couple more assholes came flying into the pile like kamikazes. They hurt too. One of them hit me right in the kidneys. Buddy scuffled over to help me. Finally, I heard the cavalry.
"Break it up punks!" yelled an officer. Another whacked his club on one of the tables left standing, and everybody stopped. Only a bottle crashing to the floor behind the bar that the bartenders had been unsuccessfully defending challenged the officers' authority. They had come in through the back door of the place, behind the stage, and stood only a few feet from me now. Four more officers came running in the main entrance. One of them stooped to help up the battered bouncer.

Cobb reappeared and came up to the stage. "I'm glad you're here."

"Are you the owner?" asked the one with the club.

"Yes sir."

"Were you present when the incident started?"

"Yes sir, the four band members provoked some of the customers. They verbally abused them and spat at them. After that, things just got out of hand."

"You're a liar, Cobb!" I yelled, finally getting back on my feet. I tried to get to him, but I was restrained and handcuffed before I knew what happened. Buddy came up too, but he was dealt with in the same manner after Cobb identified him as one of the group.

"I'll remember this... Boss," said Buddy, but Cobb wasn't listening. He was directing two more officers to the corner where Pete and Derik were lying.

"We'd better get this one to the hospital," said one.

"It looks like a stab wound."

When the paramedics arrived, they put Derik on a stretcher. He was conscious, but they covered him with a blanket as a
precaution against shock. They took the jerk out on a stretcher too. He didn't look so good.

They rounded up me, Buddy, and Pete, plus three of the main hecklers that Cobb was big enough to point the finger at. They took us out the back way to a van. On the way, we passed the room where I had left Clint. The door was open and he was gone.
Chapter 5

The weekend we had to spend in jail wasn't as bad as I expected. I tried to be as antiestablishment as I could about the whole thing. I even tried to write a song about "A Letter from a North Indy Jail," but it just didn't seem cogent. The food wasn't even that bad, compared to what we were used to.

They kept us in there for forty-eight hours, which Pete said was like drinking beer compared to six months, and then we were released, since no formal charges were brought against us. The police didn't have much of a case against anybody either, because Clint quit talking as soon as things quieted down. I figured Clint had smoothed things over with him.

The only problem with that theory was that Clint hadn't been in to smooth things over with us. And there was plenty of smoothing to be done too. He didn't even phone in offering to post bond; Stella had to do that for us, even though it didn't end up being necessary. He didn't go to the hospital to visit Derik, who was in serious condition until he stabilized Friday afternoon. Nobody, not us, not Stella, and not Derik or Cobb had seen or heard from Clint since he freaked out on stage. Stella, who hid in the ladies john during the incident, was plenty pissed at him too. He managed to slip away in her car, since he still had her keys from the earlier drive in to the club.
They released us on Saturday at midnight. Stella picked us up in our van and the four of us went back to the manor together. Stella's car wasn't there, though. In fact, there were no signs that Clint had been back at all. The phone was ringing, though, and I rushed in to answer it.

"Hello?"

"Hello, is this Clint Falcone of Deja Vu?"

"No, this is Tom Mintver of Deja Vu. Who's this?"

"This is Mark Friedman, the junior class president at Marshall High School You were supposed to play at our after-prom tonight."

"Oh shit."

"We waited until one-thirty for you. Then we had somebody bring in their stereo and play records. By then, most everybody had left."

"Oh, I'm really sorry." I really was.

"Where were you? I've been calling since yesterday. We gave you a two hundred dollar deposit and everything."

"You'll get your deposit back."

"Well, I know that, but you still ruined our after-prom. Why didn't you call and let us know you weren't going to be there? The whole thing was a flop. And I was in charge of it all."

"Look, I'm sorry. We were... sort of indisposed and couldn't phone. A check for two hundred dollars made out to your class will be in the mail first thing Monday morning. Okay? I really am sorry."

"Two hundred dollars? Is that all? I mean you didn't even
have the courtesy to let us know."

"Two hundred dollars. That's what the deposit was, and that's exactly what we'll send back to you." This kid was really starting to get on my nerves. I don't like getting irate phone calls as soon as I get out of jail.

"We'd better have it by Tuesday. Our class treasurer's father is a lawyer, you should know."

"Don't worry. You'll get the check. I guarantee it will get there."

"That's what you said about your group."

"Well yes, that's true, but something came up that just couldn't be avoided. You'll get your deposit back, ok? Thank you for calling. Good-bye." I hung up.

"'Thank you for calling?"' laughed Buddy.

"I didn't know what else to say to the little twerp. He was a snot, but it wasn't his fault that we didn't show up."

If it wasn't for the money we had to give back, I wouldn't have cared at all. I hate playing for high school kids. They couldn't care less about the band or the music. All they're concerned with is getting in their share of feels on the dance floor and sneaking booze past the chaperones. Flasks tucked away in purses, pint bottles hidden in pants pockets, even IV bottles strapped to socks with a tube running inside the clothing all the way up to the neck--you name it, high schoolers have probably tried it. They really like to party. I guess they're just like older people, only a little less refined. I hate them all, though. Ignorant yahoos.

Derik's father, the doctor, managed to get his son re-
leased Sunday afternoon. He was supposed to stay quiet for a couple weeks, which included strict orders for no guitar playing, but we were all relieved to see that he was all right. We made him take off his shirt as soon as he got in the house, but his stitches were all covered with a gauze patch and we couldn't see anything. Derik said he couldn't really remember anything either. There were several people beating him on the floor, he knew, and he figured one of them stabbed him. But he couldn't remember feeling it happen. Just the blood.

The police weren't likely to find out what happened either. After the initial report was filed, they said they couldn't do much else unless somebody came forward with information about the stabbing. Derik wasn't too concerned about being vindicated, though. He just wanted to see how badly his acoustic guitar had been hurt.

Later that evening, while the four of us were finishing supper in the kitchen, Clint came home. None of us said anything when we heard the car door. None of us said anything when he opened the screen door and came in from the darkness. We just sat there staring, like a bunch of wary Lilliputians peering from behind our spool table. Clint hesitated in the doorway, waiting for some sign of acceptance before venturing any further. His face was swollen and bruised. His long black hair hanging forward couldn't cover the blackened right eye and the wide, thin scab below.

The silence was intense. For once, Buddy didn't have a joke.
"Where have you been?" I finally asked.

"I was hiding out with a girl I used to see. I guess I, uh, just got scared." Pause. "Can I come in or not?"

"Come on in." He closed the kitchen door behind him.

"Why don't you sit down and start explaining."

"What's to explain? The whole thing was a stupid idea. I lost my composure, I guess." He sat down, though, picking a crate near the door, away from our spool table.

"Were you aware that Derik damn near got killed?" I was trying to be as cold as possible. "I don't call putting three of your roommates in jail and the fourth one in the hospital with a stab wound nothing to explain."

"I'm sorry. I didn't want anybody to get hurt. I'm sorry Derik. If you want, I'll pack my things and leave right away."

"That's not what's important, Clint. What's important is why did it happen?"

"I don't know. I don't know how it happened anymore than you guys do."

"Where'd you get the coke, Clint? Cobb? Is that why you had to go in early, before he left for the evening?"

"No. Cobb doesn't do coke."

"Bullshit, Clint," interrupted Buddy. "Don't forget I used to work for him too. He snorted up half the profits until he decided to start selling to support the habit."
"That was then. Not now. He quit man. Remember his heart condition? I was a little high, that's all. Maybe it had some bad dust mixed with it. I don't know. I don't know why I flipped out like that. I don't even remember it, but Cobb told me it was pretty bad."

"When did you talk to that bastard?" I asked. "Did he happen to tell you what he told the cops--that we, all of us, provoked the crowd and spat at them?"

"He said that? I'm sorry. I didn't know. He just told me I freaked out when he revived me and said to get the hell out of there before the cops came. He said he had already gotten you guys out of there."

"We oughta kill that s.o.b.," said Pete. "I think we owe him a visit. I don't like being screwed over like that."

"I think we do too," said Buddy.

"Well, he usually comes into the club around two or three in the afternoon," said Clint. "Why don't we drop in on him after our studio session tomorrow."

"Our studio session!" I said. I had completely spaced it. "We forgot all about that. Are you sure it's tomorrow?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Derik, you think you can play?"

"I can manage. Whoever said you need a stomach to play guitar? I'll be all right. I'm gonna get some sleep now, though." He got up to leave.

"Me too," said Pete, original as ever.
"Derik?" said Clint.
"Yeah?"
"I really am sorry."
"I know. Don't fret it." Derik was a real guitar player. He went upstairs.

Pete and Buddy went upstairs too, leaving Clint and me to return Stella's car. I really didn't want to see Clint or Stella, but there was no way around it.

Stella was very curt when we got over to her apartment, to both of us.

"I guess she was pretty upset I took off in her car," said Clint, as he started up the van to leave.

"Whatever gave you that idea?" I asked.

"Just the way she ignored me when I tried to apologize. I guess I can't really blame her."

"Blame her? You're lucky she didn't report you to the police. Auto theft is no misdemeanor. Neither is possession of cocaine."

"I told you, I wasn't coked. Cobb and I smoked a joint but that was it. We didn't even have a drink."

"Couldn't tell it by me."

"Of course not. You're just a goddamn blue-eyed boy that can't tell anything. You couldn't tell if I was coked, crocked, or cloned. You just write your little songs and dream about fifteen years ago, and wish you were there now, instead of a runny-nosed kid then."

"That's real helpful, Clint." A traffic light turned red as he punched the gas and ran the van through the intersection.
"I don't know what your problem is man, but I really think you're going nuts. You almost got Derik killed for God's sake! You always used to be able to control an audience."

"If that's the way you feel, maybe you should find yourself another lead singer. And while you're at it, look for another rhythm guitarist, another business manager, and another person to make sure you don't forget about your studio sessions. And if you do want me to leave, you'd better look for another agent too, 'cause I'll take the one we've got with me. I'm tired of this shit, getting blamed for everything that goes wrong."

"You mean you don't feel responsible for what happened Thursday night? You were the one who opened it up for requests. You know our songs aren't recent enough for that."

"Maybe they should be."

"You let somebody come up on stage. Then you tried to choke him. I mean, you looked like you wanted to kill him."

Another traffic signal. Another punch on the gas.

"I said I was *sorry*, Tom. How many times do you want me to say it? I fucked up. I admit it. If you want me to pack up and leave, just give the word and I'm gone. It would probably break up the group though. It's up to you man. But tell me. Either I'm out or I'm not, but I'm not gonna put up with your guilt trips."

Nothing else was said until we got back to the manor. By that time, everyone else was asleep. I went up to my room, but didn't feel like sleeping. For once, my piano looked
tempting. I pulled a half empty pack of cigarettes out of my desk and lit one. I hadn't touched them since we moved in here. I wanted to play. I took a long, deep drag and coughed, but it felt good. I wanted to write. It's silly I know, but I imagined a voice outside the window. It was whispering, "Play. Write. Play. Write." I started to feel nervous, but it was an exciting kind of nervousness, like you feel when you're about to make your move on a chick. I didn't think of Stella, though.

I touched the piano keys. They were soft. I brought out my journal from its unassuming spot on my lowest bookshelf, spreading its unplayed contents across the keyboard. I was hoping to salvage a late night tune. I pored through the dozens of papers I had scattered as a blanket over my piano, peeling them off one by one, looking for something I could work with. There were a lot of scribblings on the printed sheets and some lyrics, little inkblots all packed together. The words were rough and hard, just a few phrases peppered around in the tunes that had potential, but I knew there was a song, a virgin idea, in there somewhere.

I lit another cigarette. My throat was burning, but I was starting to feel wide awake and alive.

I picked up an older tune, one I had banged out by accident when I was younger. It had a bouncy, fun melody. I used to play it to warm up with every time I sat down at the piano. I wanted to play it softly, so the guys downstairs wouldn't hear me, but it was hard to go softly on such a lively
number. My fingers felt stiff, arthritic as I stumbled through the piece. It wouldn't work.

I decided to try something different. I wanted to write something new and write the lyrics first. So I lit another cigarette and tried it.

Late-in-the-evening-at-the-end-of-the-day. No, too trite. Surrounded by darkness under incandescent warmth. The campfire that protects me has changed. Double-paned smokescreens hold the wolves at bay, and now the whole camp is deranged.

Chorus But I can see the glowing eyes out there flickering in the night They're preying on me and I'm praying for help, to help me hold out 'til it's light, And the wolves go away, Slumbering through dull nine-to-fives, resting up for a nocturnal hunt. They sneak up on my light bulb and as they move closer I hear only pantings and grunts.

But I still see their glowing eyes out there flickering in the night. They're preying on me and I'm praying for help.

They'll devour me before I can fight my way out of this camp, But there's no place to run to hide from the wolves.
They'll follow my scent and my tracks.
They'll sniff out my light bulb and surround me again, and wait for my windows to crack.

And I still see their glowing eyes out there flickering in the night.
They're preying on me and I'm praying for help, shivering here under my light, as they break through my windows and tear up my smokescreen, the frenzied feast only moments away.

They nip at my flanks as my light bulb burns out and they dine before the next dreary day.

And all I can see are their glowing eyes out there flickering in the night.
They're preying on me and I'm praying for help, praying they choke with each bite.

I let out a little giggle when I finished the lyrics. It only took me two and a half hours. I gave it a mock title, "A Song for the Evening," which made me giggle out loud again. I took a twenty minute break, smoked a couple more cigarettes, and started working on the tune.

It came quickly, quicker than I expected, but I guess I was just on a roll. I started out with a slow, bass line, sticking mostly to chords that Derik could parrot with his twelve string, but the farther I went, the more I realized it would have more impact if I just kept it a piano solo. The tune was a mock too, a chanson d'amour, with a relaxed,
ritzy nightclub piano melody, and a high, inspirational-sounding chorus like Burt Convy cries to, sliding back down into the next relaxed verse. I even managed to work in a nice thirty second instrumental between the third and fourth stanzas.

It moved well enough like that, but I was apprehensive about keeping it that way. I liked the lyrics too well to treat them flippantly. Try again.

This one took longer. Serious work always does. Finally, though, I came up with a tune using a slow, rhythmic $3/4$ bass line to wade through the verses and a biting staccato in the chorus to bring out the fear a little better. I kept wanting to slip back into the first melody I had composed, but by the time the light started to seep in from the window to my right, I was playing and singing my new solo rather nicely.
Chapter 6

I woke up to the sound of my door opening as Pete knocked and walked in. I had fallen asleep at my piano. My head was pounding and the keys had left little verticle lines on the side of my face. I was chilly too. My shirt had somehow ended up on the floor and my throat was hurting from the combination of a chilly room and cigarettes.

"Looks like the genius had a rough night," he said as he came over to my horseshoe work area. "I heard the piano a couple times, but I thought I was just dreaming. What'd you come up with?"

"Besides a headache and a sore throat?" I mumbled. I felt like hell. "I wrote a song, I think."

"Well let's hear it and then decide."

I did it for him, but my voice wasn't very good.

"I like it. I'm not sure I understand it, but I like it."

"Think I should tape it at the studio today?"

"Sure, but you'd better get it in gear. We need to leave in twenty minutes." He got up to leave.

"Hey Pete?"

"Yeah?"

"What do you think we should do about Clint?"

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is, he almost got Derik killed. This is no game, man. He needs help, or he needs to get out of this business or something. We ought to do something. I just don't know what."
"How about forgiving and forgetting?"

"And what if it happens again?"

"It won't. C'mon, breakfast is ready." He left the room.

When we arrived at Palomar Studios a little later, one Ronnie Stinson was waiting on us. He greeted us with an affected air of politeness, meeting us at the door and escorting us into his office. After we all managed to squeeze in, he quietly closed the door, walked around his paper laden desk, and lit a cigarette.

"I trust that Clint has informed all of you regarding the rumors that have been flying around town of a Fall Festival," he finally said, directing his attention at me. "Well, I'm happy to say they're not just rumors anymore. The Festival is and will be Labor Day weekend at the Speedway. The names are bigger and better than any of us in town had hoped for--Crosby, Stills, and Nash, Joni Mitchell. Hell, those four together again on the same stage are enough to make this the biggest music event since Woodstock. But there's more." He was obviously enjoying himself, as if he had something to do with it, which I truly doubted. "They're still working on Neil Young, but I'm not getting my hopes high on that note. But they do have commitments from Bob Dylan and Arlo Guthrie's even going to come out of hiding. To round things out, McGuinn, Clark, and Hillman have agreed to play a set, probably a couple of songs with Crosby. That's a pretty impressive list, isn't it?"

"Sure," I answered. "But get to the point. This is cutting into our studio time."
"Relax, Tom. I'll make your recording time good tomorrow and Wednesday. But to the point, you ask. You've probably also heard the rumor that a local band gets to play warm up at the Festival. Well, that's no longer a rumor either. If you guys play your cards right, you can be that band." He paused for his statement to have its full effect. I hated this bastard, but I knew we owed it to ourselves to hear out his schemes. Doubtless, he figured on cashing in himself on our talent. The studio time he was suddenly so generous with. The red carpet greeting. It only made sense. But maybe he could get us in the Festival.

"I don't think I have to emphasize what an opportunity this is." he continued. "And I think I can help you get there. Obviously, you've already been working on it some and that's good. It gives you a jump on the other local bands. That stunt you pulled this weekend that landed you in jail was a smart move."

"We didn't plan that, Stinson," interjected Clint. "That just happened."

"Regardless, it has the Deja Vu name on the lips of everybody in town. Everybody who counts anyway. If we make our move now, and we have to, I think I can get Deja Vu booked for the Festival."

"Tell us your plan, and then we'll go talk it over with our agent," I interrupted.

"Well, he won't like it. What I'm asking you to do is drop your agent and let me go to work for you. Look, we don't represent many groups here at Palomar, and as a rule, we don't
ask groups to drop their agents because we don't like to mess around with bar bookings. But this is an exception."

"Ay, there's the rub," said Derik.

"Tom, has your agent ever mentioned the Festival to you?"
continued Stinson undaunted.

"Has he Clint?" I asked. I never talk to our agent.

"Not a word," answered Clint.

"And he's local, right?" countered Stinson. "It's not that he doesn't know about the Festival. I'm sure he does. If he's working on it, he's working for another group he represents, somebody he feels is ready to move up from playing bars. Obviously, he doesn't think you're ready, or doesn't want you to be ready. I think you are ready. Look, your agent is representing forty, maybe fifty bands, and taking 15 percent off the top from every one of those shows his groups do. Anybody who makes it to the Festival is gonna be too big for him, overnight."

"Wouldn't they be too big for you too, then?" I challenged.

"I would hope so. Look, here's the deal and I'm gonna shoot straight with you." Another pause. Another cigarette. "If I get you into the Festival, and I'll tell you how I'm gonna do that in a minute, we're going to have a Deja Vu album released one week before the Festival. It gets you a lot of local air time, and I get 75 percent of the record sales, and I think we'll sell a shitload of them that weekend at the Speedway. That's just to make it worth my time. The local group that plays there will be in the national spotlight--instantly. And after that, you're right. You'll need a bigger
agent to arrange record contracts and a concert tour. The promissory note I've got to offer you gives Palomar 25 percent of your gross income from record sales for the next two years. That sounds like a lot, I know, but I'm the one who's gonna get you there. Without me, you'll just keep on playing bars and proms until the songs on the radio now are part of a nostalgia craze. All I want is 75 percent of the record we produce, and 25 percent of your records for the next two years. I don't touch your concert earnings. They're all yours, and that's where most groups make their money anyway.

"Believe me fellas, I've done a lot of checking around, and I think you've got the best chance to make it to the Festival--with my help. I'm not saying you're the best group in town, but you're the most appropriate for the Festival. You've got the style; you're like something ten or fifteen years ago, but you're here now. That's exactly what they'll be looking for when they pick the local group. And it's exactly the kind of group that could make it big, real big, riding the waves of the Festival afterwards.

"But you've got to have somebody in there working for you. I've got the connections. It's an eleven member panel okayed by the Chamber of Commerce that's going to pick the local band. I know five of them very well and I think I can count on their votes. If those five can convince one more member, you'll have six votes and you're in. Now does my 75 percent and 25 percent sound so steep? I didn't think so. But we've got to move fast. The Festival goes public this afternoon and the panel picks the local band in two weeks."
"I need ninety good minutes on tape for them, and I'll do the rest myself. But it has to be almost entirely original material with maybe a few good creative renditions of some older songs. You probably wouldn't be playing anybody else's material at the Festival, but I can probably use a couple on tape.

"That's the deal, gentlemen. You could be very big six months from now. Go ahead, talk it over, and take the rest of the day to decide. Let me know at eight tomorrow morning when you come in to record. If you take my offer, I'll give you all the studio time and tapes that you need. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got another appointment."

We walked back to our van, which we had to unload.

"Did you know what he was up to, Clint?" I asked as soon as we had all squeezed in.

"Well, I had an idea he was working up to this, but I didn't know he would have a whole sales pitch worked up for us. Actually, I'm a little stunned. This is coming down really fast."

"A little too fast for my comfort," said Derik. "Do you think he's on the level?"

"About his connections, he's on the level. Stinson knows damn near everybody, including people in the chamber. And it seems everybody who knows him owes him a favor. Plus, he's the one that first told me about 'the rumor' flying around town. Then today, he tells us it's going public this afternoon, so I'm pretty sure he's not lying about what he knows. He's got too much inside information, some of it straight
from the Chamber. I wouldn't be surprised if he had a hand in the panel selection."

"That would explain why he's so sure about five votes, anyway," I said. "Now, what do we do about his offer. I mean, I've got no reservations in saying I'd put Stinson on about the same level as Cobb. I don't trust that bastard at all, and I'm sure he's counting on getting more out of it than what he says. But, it's almost too good of a chance to pass up."

"Well, it gets to a point," said Derik. "And I think we're at that point, where if a band isn't moving up, it's moving down. You've got to take a chance somewhere."

"We can either go for it," said Buddy. "Or we can keep getting the shit kicked out of us in every lousy bar in the Midwest."

"What do you think, Pete?" I asked.

"I'm willing to go along with whatever the group decides. Sounds like fun to me."

"I don't see where we can go wrong," said Clint.

"Well then," I said. "I guess it's unanimous. Let's go for it!"

On the way home, Clint tried to allay our apprehensions. He suggested we agree enthusiastically to all of Stinson's terms, and sign his agreements, but not drop our current agent until the local band had been selected. He said we could get away with it, since it would only be for two weeks. We decided to use Derik's injury as an excuse to cancel our bookings for two weeks, and then we could pick up right where
we are now if we didn't get selected. We were all so excited about it, we didn't even feel like going over to Cobb's to even up the score.

The next morning, early, we went back to Palomar and Stinson with our answer. The Festival had been publicly announced the previous afternoon, lending a little more credibility to Stinson's braggadocio. When we arrived, he already had the record contract and the promissory note made out. All five of us signed both agreements, and I remembered wondering when I was fourteen what it would feel like when I signed my first record contract. It was funny, but I didn't feel any different or like a new person or anything.

"Well gentlemen, I think you've made a wise choice," said Stinson, businesslike, but pleased as hell with himself. "But now it's time to get down to work, so don't count on getting much sleep for the next week and a half. Like I said before, we've got to come up with ninety minutes of your best stuff, and I suspect that means you've got a little writing and composing ahead of you. It needs to be serious material with a message to it, because this whole Festival will be a very serious musical experience. I don't want to offend anybody, but let's punt 'Fat Freida' this time. Leave the humor to Guthrie. I wouldn't use too many love songs either, maybe 'Failing Without You,' but nothing else. None of the groups that are gonna be here made their names singing love songs, and I doubt if they play many at the
Festival. Let's see if we can't get four songs taped this morning. Then we'll do four more tomorrow morning, okay?"

Nobody objected. He was the boss now, I guess.

We went into the studio and recorded "Seedless Jam," "Where There is No Darkness," "Failing Without You," and my new one, "A Song for the Evening." We played pretty well, except for Pete tensing up a few times and Derik having a hard time with his stomach singing loud enough on "Where There is No Darkness." Stinson said he could correct that in the mixing, though. He especially liked my solo, and, to be honest, I did too.

We hurried back to the Manor, painfully aware of the task that lay before us--writing and learning three new songs by tomorrow (we had already decided to use "Questions/Carry On/Questions" as one of our next four numbers). Buddy was a little miffed that Stinson had nixed "Fat Freida," but he agreed to try writing something meaningful. Clint just wasn't very creative, except on stage, so we didn't count on much help from him. He got appointed cook for the day. We all felt a little harried, but it was exciting to have something really important to do for once.

Clint set to work on lunch as soon as we got back. Buddy shut himself in his room so he could "let the creative genius of one Thaddeus Gordon Liston flow from his fertile mind without inhibition."

Derik and I had other plans. We gathered up note pads, guitars, and Pete, and headed up to my room.